



## **Face the budget crisis: Local governments must bite a very difficult bullet.**

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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was in Fresno on Monday explaining his plan to reform the state budget process, but the conversation from local elected officials was mostly about how the trickle-down aspects of government financing will hurt their agencies.

This exchange was a vivid illustration of how government officials are ill-prepared to handle a financial crisis. They didn't want to talk about budget reforms, but only about how funding cuts will hurt their communities. That may be true, but that does not change the reality that they will get less money. Their focus must change from the "sky is falling" to how best to serve their constituents in this time of declining revenue.

Unfortunately, most mayors, council members and supervisors aren't programmed to spend less, and we are seeing that now in this debate over government finances. The long-term problem is that in good financial times, government agencies will spend all the money that's available. The idea of putting money aside to get them past down cycles is a foreign concept in most communities.

Schwarzenegger, armed with charts and graphs, on Monday pointed out the state's financial problem: a budget deficit that could top \$14.5 billion. He wants to create a rainy day fund that would put money aside in good financial times, only to be used during economic emergencies.

The governor's budget stabilization act will need voter approval, which is why he is touring the state explaining the financial problems facing state and local governments. We need a long-range fix to the budget mess, but it will take a combination of cuts and revenue increases to get past the current crisis.

We also are concerned about the impact that proposed cuts will have on local agencies. But the people elected to office must get past their hand-wringing and develop strategies to make the best of these tough times.

Sanger Mayor Mike Montelongo spoke for many, telling the governor that funding reductions will hurt his community's battle against crime. Schwarzenegger was sympathetic, but he offered a dose of reality to the conversation.

"It's horrible, terrible" to cut funds for law enforcement and fighting gangs, he said. "But you can't give people more money than you have, so I have to make the cuts."

It's time for our elected officials to go into this budget cycle with realistic expectations. Everyone knows there will be less money available, so let's stop complaining about the obvious and begin dealing with the financial problems in a straightforward way.